

Castlemaine Naturalist

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**Monthly newsletter of the
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.**



© Chris Pocknee

Krefft's Glider, one of five Glider species being helped by Biolinks' collaborative 'Glideways' program.
Photo: Chris Pocknee.

November Meeting Report

"Community-connected Conservation across Central Victoria". Speaker: Dr Sophie Bickford (Central Victorian Biolinks Alliance)

For our November Monthly Meeting, we were pleased to welcome Dr Sophie Bickford (PhD), Executive Director of the Central Victorian Biolinks Alliance. Sophie is a Conservation Ecologist who had several years' experience working in organisations including CSIRO Centre for Plant Biodiversity Research, Monash University and Carbon Planet before joining the Biolinks Alliance as Executive Director in 2010. With great passion and commitment, Sophie gave us an overview of how the Biolinks Alliance is working to achieve its vision of restoring and reconnecting large landscapes across public and private land in Central Victoria to halt ecosystem destruction.

Sophie first described how the Alliance came to be in 2009 following a meeting of concerned local ecologists in Buda House, Castlemaine. They recognised that a whole-of-landscape approach to conserve environmental processes and connectivity was needed to halt the alarming ecosystem and species decline. The Alliance has now grown into a successful organisation staffed by ecologists and a support team, and partnering with community environment groups extending from the Grampians across to the Australian Alps and from the Dividing Ranges to the Murray River. Network members include 18 Landcare and umbrella environment groups, all focused on community-based conservation across Central Victoria.

Sophie pointed out that despite Victoria being the most cleared state in Australia, Central Victoria has high biodiversity and endemism with over 2000 species of plants and animals, more than the whole of Europe. But 198 animal species and 575 plant species are listed as threatened, and the threats of habitat loss due to land clearing, mining and timber harvesting, as well as feral animals, continue. Sophie stressed the urgent need for protection and restoration of the full range of ecosystems for the

region. Biolinks are also a key strategy for enabling species to adapt to climate change.

She then went on to explain how Biolinks Alliance is working with network groups to deliver a range of innovative science-based pilot projects to demonstrate effective landscape repair techniques, and to catalyse their broader uptake in the region. These projects include targeting “leaky landscapes”, reconnecting woodlands and waterways, and restoring habitat for threatened species such as Brush-tailed Phascogales, Gliding Possums and Mallee-fowl. As an example, she described the Spring Plains Watershed pilot project near Heathcote. This area had been extensively damaged during the mining years and with continued tree harvesting. While trees are regrowing, they are dense and there is no understory. The soils actually repel water so that when there is rain, it washes quickly down gullies causing further erosion and is not retained on the ground where it is needed. Leaf litter is also washed away. Ecological repair techniques being used for this project include contour ripping, gully ponding, regrowth thinning and direct seeding of native grasses. Following three years of planning, gaining approvals, consultation with government, Traditional Owners, private sector and the community as well as sourcing of funds, the ground works over a 138 ha area have now been completed, and the important task of monitoring species recovery begins. Data will be compared with baseline data obtained before treatment and also with data from a nearby control untreated area. Details about this and other projects of the Alliance can be found on their website:

biolinksalliance.org.au



Enabling more water to infiltrate into damaged soils of Box Ironbark Forests, through contour ripping and seeding of native grasses, at Spring Plains Watershed Repair pilot project, Heathcote.

(Photo: Cameron O'Mara)

The other important role for the Biolinks Alliance is knowledge sharing. Already, Parks Victoria and Djarra have visited the Spring Plains site to observe and discuss restoration techniques. The Alliance also holds webinars, expert panels and annual symposia with past topics including Linking Landscapes, Linking Waterscapes, Bolstering Refuges, Leaky Landscapes, Greater Gliders and Squirrel Gliders and Rewilding. [Recordings and information from these sessions are available on the Alliances' website](#). With limited government and philanthropic organisations' funding opportunities, Sophie emphasised the key role that private donations play in securing adequate funding for staffing and delivering their projects. Information on how to donate and to learn more about the Alliances' work can be found on their [website](#). Sophie also recently appeared on the ABC's Gardening Australia program to showcase the work of the Biolinks Alliance.

Jenny Rolland

SEANA Spring Camp 2023 at Yarram - October 20-23

Hosts: Sale and District FNC and Latrobe Valley FNC

A very interesting range of activities was planned for the weekend ranging from whale and shorebird boat trips to walks in national parks, nature reserves and other places of interest.

Unfortunately, as the weather deteriorated, several activities had to be cancelled due to the rough and windy conditions. However, in true field naturalist spirit, new choices were made and participants headed off to explore other places with expert local guides.

On Friday evening David Altiers gave an illustrated talk on the *Tarra-Bulga NP*. Situated in the Strzelecki Ranges, this park is jointly managed by Parks Victoria and the Gunaikurnai people. Featuring lush fern gullies and stands of giant Mountain Ash and ancient Myrtle Beech, but with a history of clearing for logging, mining and settlement by farmers, this natural area was under continual threat. Park status was recommended as early as 1904 and a management committee was set up in 1920. Pioneering female ranger, Kara Healey, recommended 115 acres be given NP status in 1962 and in 1986 the Tarra Valley and the Bulga NP were combined. A land swap with a private industry in 1991 joined the two areas. Today the park protects 2,000 hectares. David went on to talk about the types of forests, flora and fauna, fungi and lichens that are found in this special area.

On Saturday morning we drove to Toora to the 15 hectare wetland property of Diane Droog - Seawalls Edge Nature Reserve. Here we were treated (along with morning tea) to an introductory digital presentation describing this restoration project from its beginnings to present day. The land was first purchased and compulsorily cleared of all Swamp and Blue Gums, Messmate, Mimosa and Teatree in 1893. For the next 115 years it was a dairy and cattle farm before Diane and her partner purchased it in 2008. At this time the only features were an old shed and a few exotic trees.



Wetland area (Seawall Edge Nature Reserve)

After four years of observing and planning, they restored the shed and started planting. More than 35,000 local species plants have been planted by an experienced contractor. With an 800 mm rainfall and no rabbits or wallabies, the plants don't require water or guards but just one bamboo stake. Three wetland areas have been established with help from a retired wetland expert, and important culverts built for

drainage. An ecologist is employed to undertake ecological DNA studies and monitoring, etc. Raised garden beds have been planted with Australian natives to study what will grow. Today 90 bird sp., kangaroos, wombats, echidnas, koalas, swamp rats, frogs, lowland burrowing crayfish, lizards and snakes are present, and the land is protected by a Trust for Nature covenant.

We explored the regenerated sites, passing by wombat and crayfish burrows. We eventually reached the salt marsh adjoining the mudflat area along Lawsons Beach looking out to Wilsons' Prom. Unlike both neighbours, this area does not have seawalls (built in the 50s & 60s to keep the saltwater out) or mangroves, despite efforts to establish them — something Diane is working on. An inspirational effort!

On Saturday evening a very enthusiastic Mitch Smith (Sale FNC) kept his audience enthralled with his close-up photos illustrating his talk “*Sex, Lies and Photographs - A story of orchid pollination research around the Yarram area*”. He showed us examples of sexual deception (attracting wasps), food/resource deception (attracting bees), and food/resource rewards (attracting flies). We saw Greenhoods, Tongue Orchids, Bird Orchids, Elbow Orchids and Duck Orchids being pollinated in various ingenious ways. After 10 years of studying and photographing, Mitch has captured the pollination of 160 species.



View towards Wilsons Prom from Port Albert foreshore (Old Port Trail).



Correa reflexa var. *speciosa* (Old Port Trail)



Southern Sea-heath (*Frankenia pauciflora* var. *gunnii*) (Old Port Trail)

On Sunday morning we walked along the Old Port Trail at Port Albert under very old gnarled trunks of *Banksia serrata* and *Banksia marginata*. Some flowers we identified were Heath Teatree *Leptospermum myrsinoides*, Tiger Orchid *Diuris sulphurea*, Nodding Greenhood *Pterostylis nutans*, Common Correa *Correa reflexa* var. *speciosa*, Prickly Guinea-flower *Hibbertia acicularis* and Southern Sea-heath *Frankenia pauciflora* var. *gunnii*.

Our Sunday afternoon excursion was to the lovely remnant native grassland in the Alberton Cemetery. In damp conditions, and with very knowledgeable guides, we identified a number of plants including Stream Sedge *Carex brownii*, Running Marsh Flower *Ornduffia reniformis*, Wiry Buttons *Leptorhynchos tenuifolia*, Blue Grass Lily *Caesia calliantha* and Showy Violet *Viola bentonicifolia* subsp. *bentonicifolia*. And despite the cold, members had close encounters with brown snakes on two separate occasions! This is one of Victoria's oldest cemeteries. Burials here are believed to have taken place in the 1820s when sealers came up the Albert River to bury their dead.



Showy Violet (*Viola bentonicifolia* subsp. *bentonicifolia*) (Alberton Cemetery)



Running Marsh Flower (*Ornduffia reniformis*) (Alberton Cemetery).

Other members went on alternative excursions and there was much sharing of experiences each evening over dinner. On Sunday evening our guest speaker was Jenny Wolswinkel who described, very honestly, the trials and tribulations of writing her guide to identifying eucalypts of the district.

Some of us had planned to stay on for a few days to explore more areas but, as wet and windy weather was predicted to continue, those plans were abandoned until another visit. Thank you to all the Sale and Latrobe club members who helped to make our weekend so enjoyable.

Article and all photos by Geraldine Harris

A 'New' Orchid for the Castlemaine District

Russell Stanley

I came across this little sun orchid flowering in large numbers at the end of October and start of November at Taradale. Plants are only small, to 20cm tall, and flowers are up to 15mm across. Floral bracts are pink and buds have lavender tints. Flowers are blue or lavender in colour with a pale yellow column apex that has a purple or reddish collar. There are only a small number of flowers per plant and the stem has only one bract (sterile bract) below the point the flowers emerge. The ovaries of the flowers and the ribbed fruiting capsule are a bright lime green, or even yellowish green.

This species was named *Thelymitra pallidifructis* the 'Pale Fruit Sun Orchid' in South Australia in 2010 by Robert Bates.

While yet to be officially recognised as a Victorian species, it appears to be quite widespread, particularly in the western half of Victoria. In Victoria presently this species is conflated with *Thelymitra pauciflora*, the 'Slender Sun Orchid'.



Observations

Euan Moore - It's butterfly time again!



Above: Caper White (*Belenois java teutonia*) butterflies are making an appearance, although outnumbered by the introduced Cabbage White.



Right: Peter Turner – an explosion of Cabbage Whites in his garden.



Lynette Amaterstein

Jacky Lizard or Tree Dragon (*Amphibolurus muricatus*) on a Westringia hedge, Castlemaine.

Win Jodell

Common Long-necked Turtle or Eastern Snake-necked Turtle (*Chelodina longicollis*), Castlemaine.

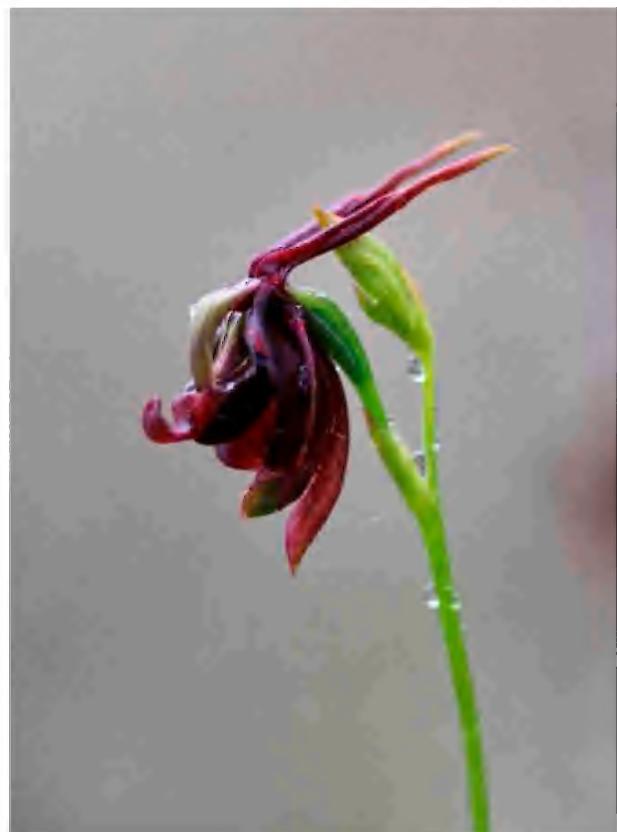


Cathrine Harboe-Ree

Flying Duck Orchids (*Caleana major*) – found near Guilford, an exciting find of a new population for our region. Previous reports were from Porcupine Ridge and Irishtown/Vaughan (Castlemaine Plant List).



LHS: "Duck's head" in set position.



RHS: The flower had been triggered by an insect which was "hit on the head".

Geoff Harris

"Many snakes are about at present, including this Red-bellied Black Snake (*Pseudechis porphyriacus*), on the banks of Barkers Creek."



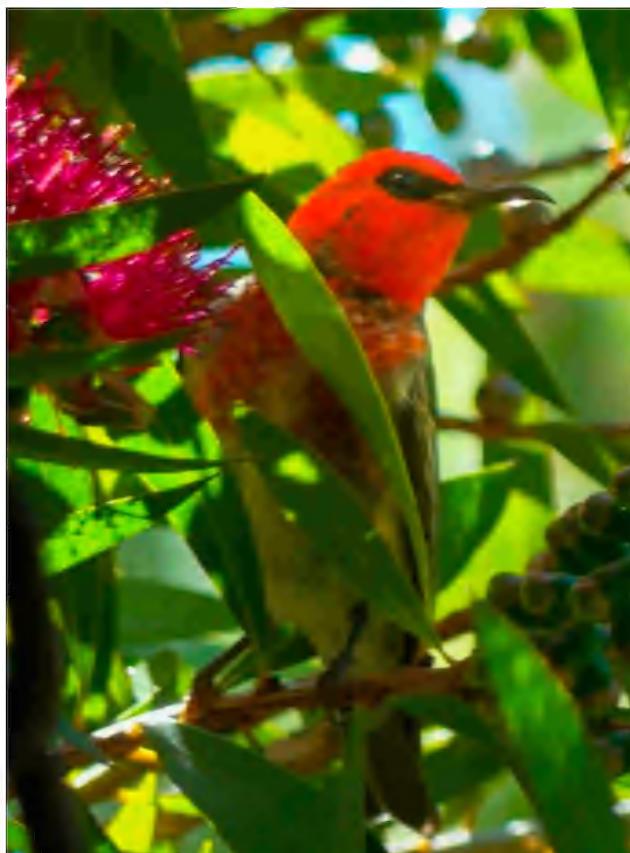
Judith Nimmo and Denis Hurley also both reported sightings of an Eastern Brown Snake crossing the road in Castlemaine.

Lou Citroen

"We have a pair of Spotted Pardalotes who have burrowed a nest in our backyard. I've been following them fairly closely (as best I can without interfering) and the 'comings and goings' are continuing. The attached shots show one taking some fibres from one of Liz's hanging baskets. The beak-full of fibres are then taken to the burrow behind the vegie beds. I'm not sure if we'll be lucky enough to catch the young eventually emerging from the burrow ... but I'll try."



Mez Woodward



Above: Golden Sun-moth (female) – 3 females and 2 males were seen. The earliest date of sightings since first noticing the moths in 2012.

Scarlett Honeyeater – seen recently from her study window!

From the Committee: Planning for the Autumn 2024 Burn in Maldon Historic Reserve

A Planned Burn in Autumn 2024 to protect assets adjacent to the Maldon Historic Reserve (MHR) was announced by DEECA's Loddon Mallee Forest Fire Management (FFM) team early this year. The assets of concern include the Castlemaine-Maldon tourist railway track, property near Maldon and farm properties north of the MHR. DEECA's Senior Community and Partnership Officer, Melissa Wilson, arranged two meetings at the MHR between FFM staff and 5 local organisations including Friends of MHR and CFNC to consider concerns about potential damage to rare and threatened plants within the proposed burn area.

Following the first meeting in June, FFM agreed that the burn would be held in Autumn not Spring. The main focus of the second meeting on October 26th was for the environmental groups to emphasize the importance and locations of rare and threatened plants in two sections of the planned burn area – NW corner (e.g. Greenhoods) and NE corner (where we met at the junction of Railway and Donkey Farm Tracks) (e.g. Sun Orchids and critically endangered *Grevillea micrantha*). Both these areas are close to the Tourist Railway line; the NW section is close to housing and other assets. FFM staff agreed to consider whether a section of the NE corner could be excluded from the burn, and to aim for a “cool” burn in the NW area – while emphasizing that they cannot guarantee such outcomes. Protection for small areas of critical species is possible if these are identified.

We appreciate that FFM is consulting with concerned stakeholders from the region and will continue to advocate for protection of environmental assets.

Peter Turner

November Roadside Clean-up

Our final Roadside Cleanup for 2023 was held on Monday 13th November. Weather conditions were good and the task was completed in a couple of hours. We collected about 385 litres of rubbish (14 half-filled 55 litre bin bags) plus a tyre, a door and a number of golf balls.

We saw patches of Sticky Everlastings, Twiggy Bush-pea, Wiry Buttons and Magenta Stork's-bill.



Thanks to Alison, Geraldine, Peter, Nigel, Jenny & Euan.

Geoff Harris

Successful Rescue on the Leanganook Track 19.9.23

During the first week of the last school holidays Mikaela, Charlie, Olivia (12) and Freida (9) Beckley decided to do the three day/60 km hike along Leanganook Track (the Goldfield Track section of the Great Dividing Trail from Bendigo to Castlemaine). Their first camp was at the Goom Gooruduron-yeran Camping Area at Mandurang South, but heading off early Tuesday morning they encountered a problem! As they followed the trail along the deep concrete channel section, they surprised a couple of adult wallabies at the race's edge. The adults hopped off into the surrounding bush and the Beckleys moved forward over the small bridge across the channel. It was then that they realised that the fleeing wallabies had probably been concerned about a young wallaby which was trapped down in the deep concrete race unable to escape the high walls of the channel! What to do?

Mikaela phoned us and told us where the small wallaby was and sent a couple of photos of it sheltered under a culvert in the race. Fortunately, there was no water in this section of the channel. We contacted Wildlife Victoria and reported the incident and headed off to locate the young wallaby to make sure it was still there. We found the location and immediately sighted the young animal just where Mikaela had reported it sheltering under the road culvert - staying still and remaining in a sheltered spot just as its mother had told it to do if they ever got separated. At the same time we received a call from the volunteer and we were able to direct him to the exact location.

We made a plan of attack and lowered ourselves quietly into the channel. The volunteer came from behind the wallaby with a blanket and Geoff and I spread a mattress protector between us in front of it. Cautiously it hopped forward and fairly quickly, having nowhere else to go launched itself into the soft white mattress protector and we were able to drop onto it and secure it safely in the blanket. As it appeared to be perfectly mobile and healthy the volunteer decided to release it back where the adults had been, and it immediately hopped off into the bush. It was the volunteer's first successful channel rescue. Often by the time animals are found in these circumstances they are wet and exhausted and do not survive. We phoned the good news to the Beckley family.

On a sadder note, as we were packing up after the successful rescue, Geoff discovered a large dead echidna trapped in a deep rectangular 'inspection hole' alongside the channel. This poor animal had not been so fortunate.

Wildlife Victoria can be contacted by making a report online at wildlifevictoria.gov.au between the hours of 6.30am and 8.30pm and a team member will usually call back within the hour. Outside these times or if the case is urgent, please contact the Wildlife Victoria emergency response number (03) 8400 7300 - 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

Geraldine Harris

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

COMING EVENTS

MONTHLY MEETING: Friday 8th December, 7.30pm Uniting Church Fellowship Room, Lyttleton St, Castlemaine

Members night!

A chance for you to share your interesting nature observations and stories from the year. What was your most exciting Bioblitz sighting? You can show photos, a video or a short power-point presentation, recite a poem or sing a song.

Please email your photos to Euan Moore at calamanthus5@bigpond.com by noon on the day of the meeting. If you have any queries about how to show your presentation, please contact Euan.

Please bring a small contribution to supper which will follow the meeting.

END OF YEAR PICNIC: Tuesday 12th Dec, 5pm onwards Castlemaine Botanical Gardens

- Meet on the lawn at the northern end of the Botanical Gardens
- BYO-everything (including chairs and insect repellent)
- Park in Downes Rd near the corner with Froomes Rd and enter by the NE gate, or park in the northern Downes Rd carpark
- A chance for a wander in the Nature Reserve to see the wildflowers in between relaxing and enjoying good company in a beautiful setting.

Program for 2024

- **January – no meeting or excursion**, but this is the time to search for Eltham Copper Butterflies and other interesting flora and fauna!
- **Monthly talks and excursions** will resume in February.
Details will be emailed to members and posted on our website.

Castlemaine Naturalist - email newsletter material to: newsletter.cfnc@gmail.com

* Deadline for the February edition: **26th January**

Club website (Webmaster: Ron Wescott) – www.castlemainefieldnaturalists.org.au

Subscriptions (Membership forms on CFNC website)

Ordinary membership: Single \$35, Family \$50

Pensioner or student: Single \$25, Family \$30

Subscription includes the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist.

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